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ABSTRACT

The study investigated adjustment problems of 197 Korean students at 4 universities (3 urban and 1 non-urban) in Texas during the 1989-1990 academic year. Findings showed that students seemed to adjust relatively well to American higher education, but were still struggling to adjust in financial, communication/language, and social/cultural areas. Female students seemed to perceive the verbally related adjustment problems as more difficult than male students. Length of stay in the United States and geographic location were significant factors in adjustment level. The variables of age, academic classification, religion, and family status did not seem to be significant adjustment factors. Recommendations are made for further study. Includes 14 references. (JDD)

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Selected Korean Students' Perceptions of Adjustment Problems in American Higher Education

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This study investigated Korean students' adjustment problems in American higher education. Students (N = 197) at the selected four universities in Texas completed survey questionnaires.

The number of foreign students in American higher institutions increased steadily until recently (Boyer & Sedlacek, 1986). The total number of foreign students was 349,609 in 1986-1987 (Gwaltney, 1987). With this large number of foreign students, certain problems have become apparent in their adjustment to study in America (Bulthius, 1986).

Research studies on foreign students investigated their needs, expectations, attitudes, experiences, problems, and factors affecting their adjustment in the United States. These investigations identified various problematic areas of their adjustment. The most serious problem areas were English language proficiency, financial, academic or educational, and social and cultural (Pugh & Fenelon, 1988; Locke and Velasco, 1987; Marion, 1986: Heller & Geringer, 1984; Cadieux & Wehrly, 1986; Huang, 1977). English language proficiency had a most significant effect on all kinds of foreign students' adjustment problems (Hosseni, 1981; Kangwanshirathada, 1983). Their degree of interactions with Americans also had a significant effect on their adjustment (Vaz, 1984). The variables of sex, age, academic classification, length of stay in the United States, and marital status were consistently found to affect the social and psychological adjustment problem areas (Adelegan & Parks, 1985; Ng, 1981).

Although an every increasing number of Korean students are coming to America for higher education, very few research studies have reported comparing the problems of Korean students among themselves, and almost none have attempted to identify and compare the intensity of problems of Korean students within the sociodemographic variables.

This study was designed to identify the major adjustment problems and problem areas perceived by Korean students in selected four-year universities in Texas, to determine whether or not Korean students had significant differences in their perceptions of adjustment problem

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areas when compared within the sociodemographic variables, and to determine whether there were significant differences between the perceptions of adjustment problem areas.

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 197 Korean students selected from four universities which included three urban universities and one non-urban university in Texas during 1989-1990 academic year. Of the students, 87% (N = 172) were males, 53% (N = 105) were older than 30, 91% (N = 179) were graduates, 73% (N = 143) were married, 50% (N = 98) were Protestants, 66% (N = 103) had been living with at least one of their family members in America, and 69% (N = 136) were enrolled in the non-urban universities. By length of stay in the United States, 31% (N = 62) had stayed less than two years, 34% (N = 49) had stayed between two and four years, and 35% (N = 68) had stayed more than four years.

Instruments

The two-section self-report questionnaire was developed from the previous research and pilot tested to measure personal demographic information and data concerning perceptions from the selected students. The first section of the questionnaire included seven personal demographic items of information: (1) sex, (2) age, (3) academic classification, (4) marital status, (5) length of stay in the United States, (6) religion, (7) family status. The variable of geographic location of the institutions was obtained by utilizing two different-colored questionnaires. The second section of the questionnaire included eight different adjustment problem areas, and each problem area was comprised of items designed for that specific potential problem area: (1) communication-language (9 items), (2) academic (9 items), (3) social-cultural (11 items), (4) psychological-personal (8 items), (5) financial (8 items), (6) health (8 items), (7) housing-food (10 items), and (8) international student affairs (9 items). In order to measure the degree of difficulty of each problem item, a five-point Likert-type response scale was employed: 1 = no difficulty/ trouble in, 2 = little difficulty/trouble in, 3 = some difficulty/trouble in, 4 = much difficulty/trouble in, and 5 = a great deal of difficulty/trouble in.

To identify the major adjustment problem areas, the mean area scores and the rank order were used. To identify the major adjustment problem items, the mean item scores and the rank order were used. To compare the students' perceptions within each problem area by the sociodemographic variables, the mean area scores were also used. To compare the students' perceptions among the problem areas, the mean area scores were also used.

Analyses

Descriptive statistics were utilized to identify the major adjustment problems and problem areas of the students. The univariate one-way ANOVA with Scheffe follow-up test was employed to measure the differences between the mean area scores at the .05 level or better.

FINDINGS

Adjustment Problem Areas

For the total group, the mean area scores for the eight adjustment problem areas ranged from 2.5730 to 1.9980. Based on the mean area scores, the most difficult problem areas perceived by the students were the areas of financial (Mean = 2.5730), communication-language (Mean = 2.5314), and social-cultural (Mean = 2.5012). The least difficult problem area was the academic (Mean = 1.9980).

Adjustment Problems

In the communication-language problem area, the mean item scores ranged from 3.3147 to 1.6041. The most difficult problem was "understanding American idioms/slang," and the least difficult problem was "reading textbooks and class assignments."

In the academic problem area, the mean item scores ranged from 2.5206 to 1.6276. The most difficult problem was "adjusting to the informal atmosphere in classes," and the least difficult problem was "understanding the U.S. grading system."

In the social-cultural problem area, the mean item scores ranged from 2.7385 to 2.1327. The most difficult problem was "maintaining good relations with the local community," and the least difficult problem was "maintaining identity with people at home."

In the psychological-personal problem area, the mean item scores ranged from 2.3010 to 1.8878. The most difficult problem was "shyness," and the least difficult problem was "making decisions independently."

In the financial problem area, the mean item scores ranged from 3.3144 to 2.4082. The most difficult problem was "saving enough money for future use, "and the least difficult problem was "receiving continuous support from my own family/government or other financial sources."

In the health problem area, the mean item scores ranged from 2.7513 to 1.9442. The most difficult problem was "getting enough exercise," and the least difficult problem was "frequent headaches."

In the housing-food problem area, the mean item scores ranged from 2.3763 to 1.9188. The most difficult problem was "adapting to American food," and the least difficult problem was "getting my native food or food ingredients."

In international student affairs problem area, the mean item scores ranged from 2.3385 to 1.8073. The most difficult problem was "finding a host family," and the least difficult problem was "getting passport extension."

For the total problem items, the

mean item scores ranged from 3.3147 to 1.6041. The two most difficult problems were "understanding American idioms/slang" (Mean = 3.3147) and " saving enough money for future use" (Mean = 3.3144), and the two least difficult problems were "reading textbooks and class assignments" (Mean = 1.6041) and "understanding the U.S. grading system" (Mean = 1.6276).

Comparisons Within Problem Areas By Sociodemographic Variables

By the analysis within the problem areas by the sociodemographic variables, there were no significant differences between the means except the following findings:
1) The female students had significantly more problems in the communication-language problem area than male students. 2) The unmarried students had significantly more problems in the academic and psychological-personal problem areas than the married students. 3) The students who had been less than two years in the United States had significantly more problems than those who had been in the United States more than four years in the areas of communication-language, academic, and social-cultural. The students who had been in the United States less than two years also had more problems than those who had been in the United States between two and four years in the communication-language problem area. Moreover, even the students who had been in the United States between two and four years had significantly more problems than those who had been in the United States more than four years in the areas of communication-language, social-cultural, and international student affairs. 4) The students who were enrolled in the urban universities had significantly more problems in the problem areas of communication-language, academic, financial, and housing-food than those who were enrolled in the non-urban university.

Comparisons Among Problem Areas

According to a comparative analysis among the problem areas, the students had significantly more problems in the areas of financial, communication-language, and social-cultural than in the problem areas of psychological-personal, housing-food, international student affairs, and academic. The students also reported more financial problems than health problems and more health problems than academic problems.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following major conclusions were made: 1) The students seemed to adjust relatively well to American higher education. However, they were still struggling to adjust to the problem areas of financial, communication-language, and social cultural. 2) The students seemed to perceive the verbally-related

adjustment problems as the most difficult adjustment. 3) The female students seemed to perceive more difficulty in the communication-language problem area. 4) The unmarried students seemed to perceive more difficulty in the academic and psychological-personal problem areas. 5) The variable length of stay in the United States seemed to be a significant factor determining the students' level of difficulties in the problem areas of communication-language, academic, social-cultural, and international student affairs. 6) The variable geographic location of the institutions seemed to be a significant factors determining the students' level of difficulties in the problem areas of communication-language, academic, financial, and housing-food. 7) The variables of age, academic classification, religion, and family status did not seem to be significant factors determining the students' level of difficulties in the adjustment problem areas. 8) The students' level of difficulty in the communication-language problem area seemed to be significantly affected by the variables of sex, length of stay in the United States, and geographic location of the institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the following recommendations for further study were made: 1) to investigate most effective ways to resolve the students' most problematic adjustment problems and problem areas; 2) to investigate whether or not there would be significant differences in responses of Korean students in other regions and/or other types of institutions when using the variables of age, academic classification, religion, or family status; 3) to investigate other variables which might affect Korean students' adjustment problems; and 4) It was also recommended that any Korean student who travels to America to study should first review tapes, and books, and movies about American culture; if possible, Korean advisors should participate in exchange programs so that they can better prepare the students coming to America from their own exchange experiences about American culture; and faculty members who teach Korean students should refer to this and other studies to give the faculty insights into their particular problems so that they can better serve the Korean students.

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